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ARTICULATION SUCCEEDS —

A CAUTIONARY VIEW

being a panel discussion of

The College English Association

at the

Conference on College Composition and Communication

Washington, D.C., April 7, 1961



Participants: Donald R. Tuttle
Joseph Mersand
Robert T. Fitzhugh
Floyd Rinker
John Hicks, Moderator



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IF ARTICULATION SUCCEEDS— A CAUTIONARY VIEW

THE members of the teaching profession in English have long dreamed of a day when high school students will approach college with a well defined and effectively inculcated knowledge of the English language and its basic literature; when high school teachers will have an adequate accreditation in the subject which they profess; when the progress into college English will be the natural and proper progress into a more mature study of rhetoric, of effective thought, and of the excellences of mature literature. The College English Association has engaged in this dream of a day when articulation in English studies between high school and college might be effectively achieved. CEA, in conjunction with the Modern Language Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the American Studies Association, brought forth in September of 1959 the statement "The Basic Issues in the Teaching of English," a most imposing and thought-consuming effort at charting the ideal future course of such articulation. But if the "Basic Issues" pamphlet was the statement of a hope and a dream, implementation of this hope and this dream often look now to be further off in the future than we had dared fear when it was being formulated.

With increased public lip-service to the virtues of education, and especially to the command of our native language; with the burgeoning population; and with a scarcity which makes even English teachers something of a prize in the public employment offices — with these we have managed to generate a great deal of optimism among ourselves. We sometimes even allow ourselves the luxury of thinking in the simple terms: not merely *if*, but indeed *when* articulation succeeds. . .

In the optimism and good spirits which followed upon the publication of the "Basic Issues" pamphlet, several CEA members were heard to say, "This all sounds very good, but —." I suppose that if you had to characterize the CEA by some motto, this one might serve better than many another: "This all sounds very good, but —." Why not look into the possibilities and the problems of high school-college English articulation more carefully to see whether we might afford to be as optimistic as we would like to be. Let us look into and destroy any complacencies which might themselves hamper the profession's ever reaching real improvement and a real goal.

To this end the College English Association set up the panel from which the following statements are reprinted. First we thought of all the people who might most profitably and understandingly view the problem of articulation in a diversity of ways. The four persons whom we finally secured for the panel were exactly the four with whom we started, because these are men who have devoted much of their professional energy to making the dream of professional excellence into

2 ARTICULATION

a reality. Donald R. Tuttle, Professor of English at Fenn College, has devoted countless and self-sacrificing hours of his life to the problem of teacher accreditation and the improvement of the education in English given to high school teachers. Joseph Mersand, Chairman of the English Department of Jamaica High School, has written and spoken widely on the problems of the high school English teacher and related matters, and has served as lecturer in a number of colleges, most especially the University of The City of New York. Floyd Rinker is a person of long experience as an English teacher, whose value in that calling has been recognized in his selection by the College Entrance Examination Board as Executive Director of its recently established Commission on English. Robert T. Fitzhugh, Professor of English, Brooklyn College, has long been a vigorous and encouraging critic of the ills of college English teaching, especially during his service before 1950 as the Executive Secretary of the College English Association.

To put the following discussion in its right perspective, let me pose succinctly some of the challenges which these speakers had in mind as they prepared their statements.

Most of us in college English teaching would probably agree that the largest part of our efforts in the freshman, and perhaps in the sophomore, year is little better than remedial, attempting to bring the student to a mastery which he should have achieved in the first two or three years of high school, if not before. If, then, the articulation efforts of the collegiate professional organizations should actually succeed, would they not mean the end of a large collegiate profession of communications-composition teaching?

In fact, does the preceding question not imply two still more basic questions: first, do the communications-composition staffs in college really constitute a professional group with the dignity, the goals, and the self-discipline which belong to a true profession? And second, has teaching in this "service" area sunk to such ego-damaging depths of futility that a positive good might be accomplished in eliminating it? If the work which should be accomplished in high schools and the lower years were truly accomplished there, is there any reason to suppose that university administrations and boards of control would allow us to continue holding the same large staffs in order that they might be turned toward mature teaching of literature and of elegant writing?

It is blind optimism to suppose that an English department would not be economized almost out of existence, once its journalistic or "service" function of achieving bare literacy were removed. For that matter, is it fair to ask whether the present type of staff needed for composition and communications would be competent to teach the more appreciative and scholarly levels of literature and writing, assuming that quantities of students would herd into these more advanced courses?

Putting aside these rather jaundiced questions, one begins to face still other problems. In spite of enthusiastic campaigns and drives by the collegiate English profession, is the accreditation in public schools

of teachers of English getting anywhere? Do all our efforts bid fair to staff all public schools with teachers of real competence even if we measure that competence only by hours of credit "earned" in college English departments? What is the chance that the upper ranks of our collegiate colleagues *can* train, or will permit anyone to try to train, prospective teachers in the art which they truly should profess?

But suppose that we could, in fact, have the kind of ideal teacher we should like to see staffing the high school English program. Full articulation would mean an organized progression of teaching materials and levels of learning, to be imposed upon our present system. Could this be achieved without rigidities and authoritarian controls which we all profess to abhor? Would the "wrong" people continue, as the wrong people so often do, to get control of the whole system and impose their own imperial ambitions, to the detriment of our true goal? Or consider the mobility of our population: would not federal controls have to be imposed eventually if we hoped to assure that a student who takes five years in Mississippi will continue in the sixth year in New Hampshire according to a reasonable and organized program?

Or suppose that we have already chosen to follow a voluntary system of articulation, with progressive steps through high school into college. Will we not have to commit ourselves to some voluntary engagement in a testing program analogous to that of the College Entrance Examination Board? Will such a program alleviate our confusions? Or will the College Board Examinations themselves tend to dictate to colleges first, and later to high schools, both the structure of their teaching and the degree of content to which they may aspire at any one level? It is conceivable that a leveling *down* of the highest-quality institutions might be a concomitant of the goals sought by articulation.

Well, those were some of the questions — often loaded and often jaundiced — which engaged the four panelists before they came to deliver their thoughts as a part of the College English Association panel, offered in Washington on April 7, of 1961, upon invitation of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. They spoke under the title, "If Articulation Succeeds — A Cautionary View."

They did not solve all the relevant problems of our profession of English teaching. But they did refuse to anesthetize our consciences with cant.

JOHN HICKS
Executive Secretary, CEA
University of South Florida

WE MUST RUN HARDER TO RUN IN PLACE

by DONALD R. TUTTLE

WHEN John Hicks asked me to speculate about what would happen to Freshman English and its teachers if good certification, accreditation standards, and sound curricula became realities, my imagination grew unequal to the task. I found myself questioning his basic assumptions to the extent that I could not give serious attention to my assigned task. I do not believe that the teaching of English will improve fast enough in the next generation, either to meet the national needs or for the colleges to escape doing a great deal of remedial work in composition and reading. No matter how well our activities may be disguised, this is what most of us are doing now. In fact, we shall be lucky if things don't get worse before they get better, despite all our efforts.

I feel this way for many reasons, chief among which are: 1. The inadequacy of our certification requirements (or in states with blanket certificates, our accreditation requirements) to insure well-prepared teachers of English; 2. The attack on certification requirements sponsored by leaders in the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, hereafter referred to as NCATE, and the TEPS Commission of the NEA, and by well-intentioned but ill-advised supporters of the liberal arts; 3. The weakness of our public school administrators in academic background and their lack of training in personnel administration; 4. The growing teacher shortage; and 5. The anarchy of our school system, or non-system, as it might better be described.

1. The function of certification requirements is to insure that teachers are well prepared for their duties, and thus to protect the children from receiving instruction from unqualified teachers, and the public from wasting its educational investment. Such requirements also protect the status of the teaching profession. They can be enforced by withholding state funds, endangering the accreditation of a school system, or by threatening the license of the administrative officer (this is never done). In states giving blanket certificates, that is certificates on which the subjects the teachers are qualified to teach are not specified, the commonest method of enforcement is through accreditation. Some states rely on both systems.

Within the past four years twenty-four states have improved their certification requirements for the teaching of English. Regrettably, the other twenty-six have not. When one realizes that in certain states it is quite legal to employ an "English teacher" who has earned only twelve semester hours of credit in English in college, including Freshman English — in most states an hour of "D" is as good as an "A" for the purpose — one wonders about the sense of responsibility of the college teachers, school administrators, and the state authorities in those states. Their "standard certificates," however, require much better preparation. If you want to know where your state stands, see John

Fisher's article in the January 1961 *College English*.

Some college teachers don't realize how much good can be accomplished through the machinery of state certification requirements. They mistakenly think that these requirements are merely intended to specify a large number of hours of Education. In the chart (on page 9) — I have tried to make it self-explanatory — one sees how spectacularly improving certification requirements has increased the preparation of beginning teachers of English in Ohio. I used Ohio because it has the best educational statistics in the country; also, naturally because I was involved in the process of raising these requirements. I was very proud to be able to show them to you. The very process of striving for the proper preparation standards brought about early progress, because in Ohio, as in many other states, the State Department of Education will not provide a certificate to graduates not recommended by their alma maters. Accordingly, it was possible to set standards on any campus above those specified by the state. We just hadn't known about it and bothered to do it. It took eight years of effort to change the state requirements; it was found easier (and wiser) to change the whole pattern of certification standards than those within just one subject, so that the movement started by the English teachers actually helped elevate standards in fourteen fields. After the state standards were improved, it took five more years (and in the case of some students more) to put them completely into effect, since the students had started college under the earlier requirements. Because the grandfather clause protects teachers already in service from new requirements, it may take forty years to get our newest underprepared teachers out of English teaching! You can see why I don't expect immediate, widespread improvement in the quality of English instruction the country over. This discussion also explains the urgency of programs for the in-service education of teachers advocated in the extremely significant NCTE report in *The National Interest and the Teaching of English*, which may well prove to be the most important report the NCTE ever published. This report stresses that from 40 to 60 % of the secondary teachers employed to teach English are woefully underprepared.

The situation in the elementary schools is so bad that I shall not even attempt to describe it today, but you will find ample data in the National Interest volume. Even the NCTE has done very little yet to improve certification standards for the preparation of elementary school teachers. I regard this as our next major task. My own view is that we should urge that elementary teachers earn at least a minor in English, plus Children's Literature and methods courses in the language arts of reading and composition. But since even the NCTE has not yet specified the amount of teacher preparation necessary for elementary English, how soon can we expect to raise national standards in this field?

2. In my dark moods sometimes I suspect that the fact that English teachers have learned how to use certification standards to im-

prove preparation of teachers has motivated educationist- and administrator-dominated organizations to turn against the use of certificates for specific subjects in the secondary school. Both Mr. Armstrong of NCATE and Mr. Stinnett, formerly of TEPS, advocate the blanket certificate, which shows merely that the student has completed the teacher preparation program of his college. This would seem to be a device to protect the courses in Education but to remove any guarantee of proper preparation in the various academic subjects taught in the secondary school. Some administrators would like this arrangement because it would make their job of selecting and assigning teachers easier. The constant temptation of administrators is to think any plan good which increases "efficiency" of operation; this term *efficiency* can easily be rationalized to mean any policy that makes it possible to avoid work. And it is work to select the right teachers and to make teaching assignments when teachers aren't thought of as interchangeable parts but must be placed in classes which they are genuinely competent to teach.

Mr. Armstrong, however, argues that enforcement can be secured through accreditation processes. He cites California as an outstanding state using the blanket certificate. Unfortunately, in California the administrators have gained control of the accrediting process. One of the chief advocates of this system has argued in print that an administrator should be evaluated by his peers. By this term he means other administrators. The same administrator elsewhere has argued that we should stop teaching subjects but instead teach democracy in the public schools. In this way — through the blanket certificate with the accrediting in the hands of secondary school administrators — both state officials and subject matter specialists can be prevented from having any voice in defining or enforcing standards for the selection and assignment of teachers of subject matter.

I believe that Mr. Armstrong is serious in believing that the system he advocates is good, and is not merely being anti-intellectual; but I know that many teachers in California are far from satisfied with the selection and assignment of teachers of English in that state.

Mr. Stinnett's argument is that learned and professional organizations should set up standards for membership and that somehow these standards would influence administrators in the selection and proper assignment of teachers. However, unlike the medical and legal professions (he loves analogies to those professions), there would be no legal sanctions for the standards of these societies.

NCATE and NEA are two of the most powerful educational organizations in the country today. They are used to getting their way, and they are very skillful in doing so. They work together and have overlapping directorates. It looks quite possible that through their joint efforts academic teachers are likely to lose the only practical medium they have of helping insure that secondary school teachers are properly educated in their fields.

The situation looks even darker because many academic persons and friends of the liberal arts in the citizenry are outraged because certification requirements have made it hard for some well-educated liberal arts graduates to become teachers without courses in Education. In Ohio this difficulty is avoided by having such teachers temporarily certified. They can work off their Education requirements later. I myself do not think that seventeen hours in Education is too much. Certainly one ought to know some psychology, have a philosophy of education, know something about the history and organization of the schools, know some tested methods in his field; and he can gain much from practice teaching under the supervision of an experienced teacher. In fact, students often find practice teaching the most valuable thing in their program in Education. The wise policy seems to me to be to reform the requirements in Education, if they seem wrong, rather than to do away with teacher certification, the greatest protection yet devised for the proper education of our children.

To me the situation seems ominous. The strange alliance of these extreme advocates of the liberal arts on one hand and certain educationists and administrators on the other is an extremely formidable one. It could well be that we will lose all the gains made in a period of reform following the second world war.

3. The fact that many administrators have come into their work through the least intellectual subjects in the secondary school curriculum is well known and widely deplored. Few of them, relatively, have taken much graduate work in an academic field and many have had no true academic major in college. Accordingly, some of them have little sympathy for the basic subjects in the curriculum. One of them recently said, "Let Browning stay in the library where he belongs." Some are actively anti-intellectual. Others have exaggerated respect for the learning which they don't have, but scarcely have the capacity to select, and appraise the work of, teachers of academic subjects. Unfortunately, their courses in school administration give them little help in any but the mechanical aspects of personnel administration. I took down a whole armload of books on school administration — that should make a random sample — from the library shelf, and found a total of only about sixty pages on the subject of teacher selection and assignment. Yet effective personnel administration is their most important responsibility. Their texts are so sadly deficient in showing how to staff their schools that they can get little help from them. Consequently, when staffing their schools, instead of starting with the choice of teachers of the basic academic subjects, school administrators are just as likely to pick the coaches and special teachers first and to have them fill out their loads in English and history, as to hire needed academic specialists first. After all, anyone can teach English!

If most secondary school administrators had strong academic backgrounds, as college administrators often do, and if they had proper stress put upon effective personnel administration in their Education

8 ARTICULATION

courses, certification requirements *might* not be necessary.

But even this an optimistic view, for there is the school board to consider. Such a man as Mortimer Smith of the Council on Basic Education believes that the hope of the schools lies in the school boards. But sometimes such groups are so incapable and even venal that a good administrator needs protection from their low standards. Certification requirements strengthen the administrator's hand against poor boards. I omit demonstrations from official reports showing what some of the school boards did to debase education in Ohio in the 1930's. You know of similar stories.

4. The shortage of teachers is a factor well known to all of us, and it is now hurting English in the secondary schools. In October, 1960, there were still 30 teachers of English too few in Ohio schools. Last year 8.6% of all teachers in Ohio schools taught on temporary (that is, sub-standard) certificates, as compared with 6.9% the year before. Also, Ohio should have employed 974 more teachers than it did in 1960. Clearly, this shortage will be extremely influential in bringing underprepared students into college English classes for at least another decade.

5. The confusion of the curriculum resulting from the extreme disorganization of American schools is also well known. Since other speakers today appear likely to deal with this topic, I merely mention it in passing.

No, Mr. Hicks, I think we are progressing; but the future holds even greater disparities between the competence and incompetence of the graduates of our public school systems. Many students will study under the best teachers of English ever to grace our public schools, while only a few miles away others will be studying under the worst prepared teachers their schools have employed for a quarter of a century. In the colleges we'll have to do more examining, more advanced placement or some similar activities to treat the able student justly. And we'll also have to decide what to do with the graduates of schools worse staffed than all but the worst schools today. Fifteen years from now, some of the younger members of this audience might attempt a panel on today's topic with better results. In the meantime, we'll have to run harder if we are not to lose ground.



**Strength of Preparation in English of Newly Certified Teachers
of English in Ohio 1951-1960**

Source: The annual statistical summary of the State Department of Education

Semester Hours:	5-14	15	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	85+	Total English Certificates
Year											
1951	226	750	167	32	10	6	5	2	1	1199	
1953	175	592	329	15	29	13	2	2	2	1295	
1955	129	595	348	206	39	16	2	2	2	1339	
1956	139	682	377	209	48	9	6		2	1472	
1957	112	642	435	260	55	12	4			1520	
*1958	108	464	610	286	72	15	1	2	1	1559	
1959	3	90	248	817	292	52	10	1	3	1516	
1960		15	40	879	384	83	20	8	2	1	1432

*From this date onward column 1 should read 2-14; column 3, 16-23; column 4, 24-34; the rest as before.

Notes: (1) The preparation of teachers of English in Ohio was not improving prior to this chart; in fact it was deteriorating. Teachers had studied more English in 1948 compared with 1951: 15 hours, 16% vs. 19% respectively; 16-24, 43% vs. 63%; 25-34, 35% vs. 14%; 35-44, 12% vs. 3%, etc.

(2) The drive to improve certification requirements in English in Ohio began in 1947 with the College English Group of Northeastern Ohio, was taken up by the Ohio College English Association the following year, and by other organizations in the state in succeeding years. In 1953 the State Department of Education decided to appoint committees to study the revision of secondary school certification requirements. The Committees did their work in 1954-5, and after a public hearing, the new standards were promulgated in 1955 to become effective January 1, 1956. Certification requirements in English were increased from fifteen to twenty-four semester hours (Ohio makes no distinction between major or minor preparation nor between part-time and full-time teachers of English as some states do), and courses in methods of teaching English were to be classified as Education courses. The chart shows that the colleges did not wait to improve the preparation level of teachers of English. The first class under the new requirements was graduated in 1960.

(3) The proportion of English teachers in relation to all certificated secondary personnel did not decrease because of higher requirements but rose from 29% in 1951 to 33% in 1960. The reduction of the number of English teachers in 1959 and 1960 reflects the decrease of the total number of teachers prepared in those years.



WE ALL HAVE OUR OWN GARDENS TO WORK

by JOSEPH MERSAND

LAR from being new, articulation of the English program between college and secondary school and between secondary school and elementary school has long been desired. B. A. Hinsdale in 1896 advocated it in his *Teaching the Language Arts in Secondary Schools*, the first American text on methods. I am sure that illustrious predecessors did likewise in the English schools with about as much success. Every great revision of our educational program in English has made a similar plea: J. F. Hosie in 1917; W. W. Hatfield in 1935; Dora V. Smith in 1947. Today there is hardly a conference, a textbook in methods, a course of study, or a language text which does not express the same pious hope. Why, then, has there been such a noticeable lack of success in achieving what so many of us have desired?

I shall try to point out certain variables in the actual teaching situation in the secondary school, based on my thirty years as a teacher and seventeen years as a supervisor, which may account for the difficulty in achieving articulation. At the same time, I shall emphasize, as Don has, that it will be a long time before the college instructors of freshman English need worry about their jobs because the secondary schools have done what they were meant to do.

The variables are of two categories — human and material. The human variables are:

1. The capacities, interests, and motivations of the students.
2. The preparation and skills and professional standards of the staff.
3. The cooperation and understanding of other subject-matter teachers in the school.
4. The sympathy and administrative support of the principal.
5. The cooperation of the parents.

The non-human or material variables are:

1. The presence and adequacy of the course of study.
2. The availability and quality of texts and other instructional materials.
3. The time available for curriculum construction, for conference and consultation.
4. The adequacy of the school plant.
5. The facilities for informing the community of the needs of the educational program.

Each of these variables — human and material — by itself may upset the articulation apple-cart. Each by itself can be a stumbling block so massive as to cause the entire program to collapse. Time will not permit me in my fifteen-minute presentation to discuss all the stumbling blocks to our success; but I shall select a few typical examples.

Let us assume that a department or even a city school system has worked out a course of study that is well articulated, so that students are studying topics suitable to their grade level, without the need for

useless repetition year by year, in a program that is continuous, cumulative and central.

The first variable is the student. Only in the psychology textbooks, in my opinion, does the "average" student exist. In real life each one of the 150-175 secondary students whom the English teacher meets has a psychology that is unique. Any course of study at best can interest, meet the needs, and stimulate only a fraction of the class. The slow students will never meet the "minimum essentials" despite exhortation, threat, or punishments. The bright students, on the other hand, have met them several years before in the fifth or sixth grade. The ninth or tenth grade minimum essentials are so easy for these bright students that they become bored, and hence frequently the problem students in the class. Multiply this difficulty by all the areas that have to be covered in the secondary school program, and you have some idea of what we face daily.

Now let us assume that we have the ideally constructed and articulated English program and our students are ideally prepared for that curriculum. Are our teachers adequately equipped by training, native endowment or professional interest to teach this curriculum? The recently published volume of the NCTE, the *National Interest and the Teaching of English*, definitely proves that they are not. It will take a long time before we can get the teachers and train them both in pre-service and in-service periods. I am often amused at the grave concern expressed by my friends in the college over the lack of training of many secondary teachers of English in structural linguistics, semantics, and other *avant garde* concepts so dear to our forward looking colleagues. I am amused because we department heads are still waiting for some of our teachers to learn formal grammar. And for those who bewail the lack of knowledge of and use of such instructional aids as the tape recorder, the overhead projector, or even the victrola, I can reply that many of us in supervisory positions would like them first to become acquainted with the blackboard, which some have apparently not become aware of. A well-articulated program, in my opinion, obviously needs well-articulated teachers to carry it out. Of these there is a deplorable lack.

Let us stop for a moment to examine the significance of the principal of the school in this program. Let us assume that he is not the ex-football coach rewarded for his ability to discipline his squad, and that he is the scholar, gentleman, guide, and diplomat the textbooks on creative supervision consider desirable. Consider the stumbling block he may become. All kinds of pressure are put upon him by the board of education, by the parents, by the state education department, by the teachers in other subject areas. Thus, even with the best intention in the world these may interfere with or prevent the success of the articulated program. Judicious, or often injudicious, compromise is frequently his *modus vivendi* and often his action is the reverse of what Johnson said of Goldsmith: *nullum tetigit quod non ornavit*. It

might become rather: *nullum tetigit quod non destruxit.*

Examine the matter of the textbooks used. There are at least fifteen series of textbooks in grammar and composition, each of them slightly different in approach, content, or arrangement. Who is to decide which series is best suited for a program of articulation? With about eight million students in secondary schools, you can very well see the problem of providing them with texts which will be contributing to the articulation which is desirable. One would have to write an entirely new series that would be suitable for all sections of the country, all kinds of schools, large or small, and all types of students. And even then, there would be the criticism against uniformity and inflexibility.

Consider next the matter of time as a factor in preparing an articulated program. In order to implement however perfect a course of study, an English teacher in high school must have time to meet with her colleagues, with her students who need extra help or guidance, with other members of the school staff concerned with the same problems. It is the rare school administrator who has either the courage or the will to reduce the English teacher's classes so that she may have this time for conferences. In most cases, the teacher must stay after school when she is exhausted from a full day's work; or must come before school, when she is barely awake; or must steal precious moments from her lunch hour and risk indigestion or incipient ulcers. This bicarbonate of soda solution to time for conference is not the way to achieve our goals.

In my own overcrowded school of 4,000, there are certain periods during the day when there would not even be a place for a conference if there were the time, unless one met in the hallway, or in the lavatory or teacher's rest room. Things are done, if they are done at all, on the run, amidst conditions that are least conducive to reflection, creative thought and intelligent action. Shoddy conditions and shoddy workmanship lead to shoddy products, and no one need be surprised at the criticism of these products.

I have purposely touched on only a few of the variables in the articulation equation, and even these few cursorily. I have not intended to be unduly pessimistic about achieving articulation, because no English teacher can long remain a pessimist and remain in the profession. I have tried to be realistic; to face the facts as I have found them these past three decades. I began by referring to the hopes for an articulated program which had been expressed for the past sixty-five years. I still hope that some means can be found to achieve this goal. But that it will be achieved in the near future I very much doubt, and for quite some time to come the instructors on the freshman and on the sophomore level will be busily engaged filling in the gaps left by their overworked, underprepared, over-confused brethren in the secondary schools. Before we can cross that new frontier of articulation, we have much walking to do over the present ground; and like Candide at the end of his fable, we all have our own gardens to work.

FRESHMAN ENGLISH — GOOD RIDDANCE

by ROBERT T. FITZHUGH



ALL FRESHMEN write the same theme," cried a young instructor, much as the Roman emperor who wished the world had but one neck so that he might lop it. English departments have been fertile of devices to make students write better, with small success: — the opportunity section, the writing laboratory, small classes, sectioning by ability; the six-week review of fundamentals, the ignoring of fundamentals; stress on utilitarian writing, emphasis on belles lettres, limitation to expository prose, exploration of the students' psyches; stressing precis writing, or logic, or spelling, or vocabulary building, or a list of errors declared mortally sinful; eliminating composition work, or dividing the prescription into several doses or sending students who write poorly to a purgatory; using rhetorics, handbooks, casebooks, exercise books, books containing a complete course (and scornfully rejecting all such); and infinitely varied resort to all kinds and amount of reading as a stimulus, from the *Saturday Evening Post* to translations of classic Greek drama. The desperate chaos of publishers' lists is compelling evidence of dissatisfaction and the hope that next year, with a new approach, things will be better. But they never are.

There is dismal comfort in considering that no other introductory course does any better, if as well. Do more than ten percent of the students in introductory biology really know any biology? How is it in music, the Social Sciences, mathematics? English teachers under fire because "their" students do not write well might ask their tormentors what percentage of their own elementary students achieve even the most modest professional competence. General recognition of futility in elementary courses would be a healthy jolt to academic complacency. The truth about college English departments is that they work hard teaching composition in English I, and that between September and June, students eliminate errors and learn to write more clearly and coherently, but only in English classes. And by the following September, they no longer write well even there.

The reasons for this meagre result from great effort are complex. An important one is that college English departments get their students too late; not only has the time for elementary instruction passed, but the students have learned bad habits, have become indifferent or antagonistic. "It doesn't make any difference," they say. "Who cares but the English teacher?" And who does? American schools and colleges are sensitive to public opinion, even private institutions, and the American public does not care much about good writing or speaking. It is suspicious of those who are too ready with words, calls them "eggheads," "Philadelphia lawyers," "good talkers." What the American public wants taught well, it gets taught well: basketball, for example, or medicine, or social adjustment.

Anyone who has tried teaching composition knows that very little about writing can be taught. Grammar and "fundamentals," perhaps,

14 ARTICULATION

but not what any flagging theme reader is desperately looking for — perception, a sense for words, grace, force. These qualities may be developed, or given a chance to mature. But is a college composition course a good place for their development? Who ever learned to write in a college course? And who really writes as the manuals and handbooks say he should? English teachers give "A" to a few basic composition students, and "B" to a good many, thus rewarding the native abilities of the students, not a skill taught and learned.

The dilemma confronting colleges in English I is, I submit, hopeless. And the size of the operation, and its explosive annual growth, adds the dimension of madness. Staffing is a quagmire. Who teaches English I? Those at the beginning, hopefully on the rise in the profession, those at the end hopelessly on the decline, and those in the middle still bound and sullen but desperately striving for release. Young teachers break in by teaching English I; it is the traditional hazing. In universities, the staff of English I supplies the basic audience for graduate professors. And every year the course grows and grows and grows, with students writing their weekly exercises, and teachers reading them and correcting them and holding conferences on them. The thing goes on because we are committed to it, not because we have faith in it or have been successful with it. We repeat catatonically, "Everyone should be able to write his own language," as though that justified what we do. And is it true? Even for college graduates in our culture? If so, English I, as almost the sole instrument, will not produce the desired result. It almost seems that English I has become an end in itself. But it is not a career, it offers no future, and the problems of staffing and morale grow intolerable.

Consider the students, also. Much of what they are asked to do, in English I as in most of their other courses, seems purely a formal requirement to them. To meet it, they do creative library copying, or produce orderly dullness and empty observation, all graced by infelicity, solecism, and incoherence. The students are engaging, but not engaged. Their business is to "get English off."

What can be done about this muddle? Actually, the solution is simple. All that can be taught most students about writing should be taught early, certainly before the freshman year. In college, those who want students to write well should insist simply that they write as well as they can. Poorly written college exercises should be returned as unacceptable. In a word, students should come to college prepared, and in college should be held to elementary correctness, clarity, and a decent regard for structure. This would be "integration" in simple outline, and in effective result.

What happens to English I? It disappears, and a good riddance, too. How are a lot of resulting problems to be solved in the English empire? For one thing, many college instructors, sweating out slow promotion and enduring poor pay, might find brisk professional advancement in secondary schools which began to take their responsi-

bilities seriously. For another, English departments could devote energy and imagination to creating an image of themselves as centers of vital interest, certainly not the impression most students now get from English I, the only contact many of them have with the department. For a third, colleges might begin to train high school teachers to do better what the colleges now complain is not done well or at all.

How are the secondary schools going to meet the problem? First, by recognizing it. They do not do even that now. An interesting bit of supporting evidence was developed by a committee of the four New York city colleges which was examining entrance requirements. To test a suggestion that a written essay be made part of the entrance battery, the committee set up an exercise for most freshmen in three of the colleges in the first weeks of the fall semester, 1960. Administered as a class theme by the English departments, and counted as one theme of the regular term's work, the papers were read by the students' regular instructors, and then turned over to the committee for further evaluation. When results of the freshman essay were compared with high school averages, there was a correlation of .1; that is, there was no relation between what high schools regarded as good students and what college English departments regarded as good writers. A further discovery emerged when the first semester college grades were compared with the results of the writing exercise. The correlation there was only .3. Even college grades reflected very little of student competence in writing.

Despite the experience, logic, and present circumstance which point to its desirability, is there much hope for integration and articulation? Unfortunately not. The need for change is too obvious, and hence stimulates active hostility from all vested interests in danger of dislocation, and from all groups which would have to do something. But encouraging signs are not lacking. Widespread publicity given the NCTE report is one. Another is a New York State Department of Education request that the Board of Regents include an examination in English composition in the annual Regents' tests, "to impress teachers and local curriculum planners with the importance of the subject."

Meantime, as in the past, English I will continue its lonely defence of literacy, and do the best it can.



IT TAKES HEAT TO WELD

by FLOYD RINKER



THINK I will be repeating some of the things that have been more ably said by other speakers. You have seen recently a cartoon that told about a quiz show in East Germany. The second prize was to be two weeks at a Russian resort on the Baltic Sea; the first prize was to be one week at a Russian resort on the Baltic Sea.

This is the way we teach English. So often the person who does very well in his entrance examinations and/or matriculation examinations upon admission finds that he is excused from taking freshman English, or that he is allowed to drop it, after one semester, for a survey course or some other study. Of course, students who do not do well in these examinations are still admitted to our colleges; they take freshman English or remedial English or, as I know in some institutions in this country, a preparatory course to get ready for remedial English in the college program.

Now you don't improve the teaching of English or strengthen the college department of English by dropping freshman composition, unless at the same time you are guaranteeing employment of staff by expanded offerings in literature and composition. I do not think I said that with exact clearness. You do not drop freshman English and at the same time guarantee employment for all people on the staff merely by offering more courses in literature. For one thing, there isn't that much demand for our subject on the part of students. There are more departments in a college and many more electives than there were when I matriculated and decided to major in English. For another thing, we can't expect university officials to tolerate our continuous expansion of offerings. Other departments in many universities already criticize our empire-building tendencies.

Our safety, it seems to me, must lie in better quality, not greater quantity. We do not say that a college or university has a great department of English because the number of courses offered fills several pages in the catalog. Unless something is done at the college level to improve quality, we run the risk of repeating the error that has been made in other departments, namely finding progress only in a proliferation of courses with excessive repetition and overlapping.

Better programs in our secondary schools need not mean a reduction in college staff, but we might anticipate a revised syllabus for college English. If you will allow me to say it, my visits to schools and colleges have clearly indicated that all the bad teaching that is being done in English is not on the secondary school level. I should like to say further that it is my secret ambition, and I am likely to have little success, to convince chairmen of English departments in our colleges and universities to be concerned with the problems of English students who plan to teach English as a career. Sometimes in a great university the chairman of English is not aware of much that

is done in the undergraduate years, and is happy in his complete ignorance of how the students who come to his college have been prepared. I would like to begin our work in articulation with a conversion of department chairmen to the support of a truly articulated program from kindergarten through the graduate school.

A revised syllabus for college English might well include a demand by the English department and all university or college staff to maintain skills and learn new ones. Some one with a dangerous way of living might make a study of the way the ability to use the language deteriorates between matriculation and graduation, or of tendencies toward illiteracy in preparation for the Ph.D. degree. Are our students writing better or worse when they leave college?

A questionnaire sent out by our office to chairmen of English in all junior colleges, colleges, and universities in this country revealed something that I suspected, that is by selecting your school it is quite possible to be excused from English composition in the freshman year, to graduate, to take your necessary courses in education, to certify, and to teach English in most states of the Union without ever having had any work in composition beyond the secondary school. I employed such teachers in my own school system.

If the job that we did in the secondary schools could be sufficiently good that college teachers in English might think their jobs were in danger, I would say that then the time had come when advanced composition — which is not even offered in a great many degree-giving schools in this country — would be a course required in the freshman year. Not bone-head English for bone-heads or non-remedial-remedial English — and there are such hyphenated courses — but a course in advanced composition and rhetoric which rightfully belongs in the freshman year if school is school and college, college.

Most of you have read about Mr. Rice's plans for dropping freshman English at the University of Michigan. But it will be a long time before many institutions can be so exacting in their admissions that they can deny entrance to anyone not meeting high standards of English.

Of course, as it has been pointed out, the increasing number of students enrolling in our universities will mean a continued shortage, not a surplus of teachers at the college level. The program of the Commission on English, which is a very modest one, will seek to help both the school and the college, though we will limit ourselves in the initial years to working with college preparatory students in grades 9-12. Our hope is to help other organizations and academic institutions in upgrading the teaching of English in college preparatory classes with emphasis on the academic improvement of teachers, the conditions under which our secondary school English teachers work, the design of curricula, and the teaching materials that are available.

The questions most frequently asked of me as I go about the country are, "Do you mean that the Commission on English will provide us a good composition text book?" or "Where can we get a satis-

factory text for teaching composition?" The Commission will encourage patterns of teacher training that involve all college and university English departments in offering courses designed specifically for teachers. It will make information about its program available to school and college teachers of English, and to school administrators and all those that sponsor similar programs.

Even if a new program proves sound and is widely adopted, the writing of curriculum will have to be done at the local and state level by English teachers who know their school, their students, their community, and their objectives. It cannot be imposed upon a country. We hope for a better training of people who want to go into English teaching. We will hope that teachers in the profession will receive further aid; that there can be a clearer picture of what English is (and it took long months and much discussion before we could even get the thirteen members of the Commission to agree on what is English).

The improved conditions are something far more than a proper load of classes, of class size, of teaching materials, of good books, of adequate pay; more than this the teacher wants to know and needs help in how to teach. Too few of the people who are teaching English in our secondary schools have any formal training in language; and some who have had the most success have depended solely on Latin grammar, which is not exactly the science of English. A great many teachers in all parts of the country — and I must say that no section of this country has a premium on good teaching, or on bad — seem very much surprised at the notion that you can get from a piece of literature anything more than a springboard for discussion of some ethical problem. The class in literature often wanders into some social or personal morass with the teacher telling his experiences and asking the class for theirs. And rarely is there the kind of critical analysis that you might reasonably expect from college preparatory students.

As I said before, the problem does not lie solely in the schools. The perception of English departments regarding their role in teacher education should change; so should the ability of departments of English to establish liaison with the schools of education that must provide courses necessary for certification.

The exciting promise is that the person going into English teaching at the college level may find himself freed of remedial work, realizing the dignity and the challenge of teaching a program of more substance and consequence than what we now so often find in the freshman and sophomore years — and this will happen only when the colleges prepare themselves for a change in responsibility, and only when they recognize that articulation is not something the schools do to accommodate the college.

What we must realize is that both the college teachers of English and public school teachers have to weld their programs into one. My colleague frequently reminds me that it is almost impossible to weld metals unless they are both hot.

